



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services
4625 Morse Road, Suite 104
Columbus, Ohio 43230
(614) 416-8993 / FAX (614) 416-8994

December 9, 2009

Timothy M. Hill
Office of Environmental Services
Ohio Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 899
Columbus, OH 43216-0899

TAILS: 31420-2010-F-0179 (PID 87318)

Attn: William Cody

RE: **POR-Rock Spring Road (PID 87318) Stimulus Project**

Dear Mr. Hill:

This letter is in response to your November 20, 2009 request, received in our office on November 23, 2009, for site-specific review pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, regarding the replacement of the Rock Spring Road bridge over Hinckley Creek in Portage County, Ohio. The project proposes to remove and replace the existing structure and improve the north and south approaches, with approximately 1,400 feet of roadway approach work on the north leg and 1,200 feet on the south leg. The project will also include 1,000 feet of work on SR-5 to align the new grade of the bridge over the railroad tracks. We understand that in-stream work will be required in Hinckley Creek for the removal of the existing bridge substructure and the replacement of piers. A tributary to Hinckley Creek will also be impacted due to the rehabilitation of and addition of a 42-foot extension to an existing culvert under SR-5. In addition, 0.28 acres of wetland impacts will result from the placement of fill in a Category 2 wetland to allow for roadway work and slope stability. A total of seven trees offering suitable roosting habitat for the Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) will be cleared for the project, including one tree with maternity roost characteristics. Your documentation indicates that the project will not remove any travel corridors or disconnect woodlots because the tree removal will be contained to trees directly adjacent to the active roadway. **We understand that this is a design/build project; therefore, specific design information is not yet available. If the impacts described here change with development of the final design, please coordinate further with this office.**

On January 26, 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) issued a programmatic biological opinion (PBO) for the Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) Statewide Transportation Program through January 2012. This PBO established a two-tiered consultation process for ODOT activities, with issuance of the programmatic opinion being Tier 1 and all subsequent site-specific project analyses constituting Tier 2 consultations. Under this tiered process, the Service will produce tiered biological opinions when it is determined that site-specific projects are *likely to adversely affect* federally listed species. When *may affect, not likely to adversely affect* determinations are made, the Service will review those projects and, if justified, provide written concurrence and section 7(a)(2) consultation will be considered completed for those site-specific projects.

In issuing the PBO (Tier 1 biological opinion), we evaluated the effects of all ODOT actions outlined in your Biological Assessment on the federally listed Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*). Your current request for Service review of the POR-Rock Spring Road bridge replacement project is a Tier 2 consultation under the January 26, 2007, PBO. We have reviewed the information submitted by your office describing the effects of the proposed project on federally listed species. We concur with your determination that the action is *likely to adversely affect* the Indiana bat. As such, this review focuses on determining whether: (1) this proposed site-specific project falls within the scope of the Tier 1 PBO, (2) the effects of this proposed action are consistent with those anticipated in the Tier 1 PBO, and (3) the appropriate conservation and mitigation measures identified in the biological assessment are adhered to.

That is, this letter serves as the Tier 2 biological opinion for the proposed POR-Rock Spring Road bridge replacement project. As such, this letter also provides the level of incidental take that is anticipated and a cumulative tally of incidental take that has been authorized and exempted in the PBO.

FISH AND WILDLIFE COORDINATION ACT COMMENTS:

We recommend that impacts to streams, wetlands, and other important habitats be mitigated. Natural buffers around streams and wetlands should be preserved to enhance beneficial functions, and culverts should be placed to allow free movement of aquatic fauna. We recommend using native vegetation to control erosion, or, at a minimum, using native vegetation in combination with rock. That is, we recommend the use of natural channel design techniques where applicable and the maintenance of existing riparian habitat zones to the maximum extent possible.

The Service supports and recommends mitigation activities that reduce the likelihood of invasive plant spread and encourage native plant colonization. Prevention of non-native, invasive plant establishment is critical in maintaining high quality habitats. All disturbed areas in the project vicinity should be mulched and re-vegetated with native plant species.

Description of the Proposed Action

Your November 20, 2009 letter and supporting documentation include the location and a thorough description of the proposed action. The action, as proposed, involves the replacement of the Rock Spring Road bridge, which spans over Hinckley Creek and the CSX Railroad, in Charlestown Township, Portage County, Ohio. The purpose of this project is to replace the existing, deficient bridge in order to maintain a safe route of travel. Seven trees offering suitable roosting habitat for the Indiana bat will be removed for the project, including one tree that exhibits characteristics of maternity colony roosting habitat. ODOT will implement the following conservation measures to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate adverse impacts to the Indiana bat: 1) any unavoidable tree removal will take place between September 30 and April 1 to avoid direct impacts (alternative measure A-1), and 2) protection/restoration of riparian areas where the Indiana bat forages to offset loss of prey base and/or loss of foraging area (mitigation measure M-2). **The Service appreciates ODOT's use of the revised tree clearing dates of September 30 and April 1.**

As stated in your letter, ODOT will subtract 3.7 acres from the Mahoning 80 Wetland Mitigation Site to compensate for impacts to wooded habitat that will be cleared for new and temporary right of way for this project. **We understand that the 3.7 acres will be subtracted from upland forested acreage (i.e., not from forested wetland acreage) at the Mahoning 80 site and that this acreage will then be unavailable to mitigate future project impacts.** Upon subtraction of the 3.7 acres for this project, **25.38 acres of wooded habitat** (including both upland and forested wetland) will remain at the Mahoning 80 Mitigation Site for future mitigation.

Status of the Species

Species description, distribution, life history, population dynamics, and status are fully described on pages 13-26 for the Indiana bat in the PBO and are hereby incorporated by reference. Since the issuance of the PBO in 2007, there has been no change in the status of the species.

Species descriptions, life histories, population dynamics, status and distributions are fully described on pages 23-30 for the Indiana bat in the PBO and are hereby incorporated by reference. The most recent population estimate indicates 468,184 Indiana bats occur rangewide (King 2008). The current revised Indiana Bat Recovery Plan: First Revision (2007) delineates recovery units based on population discreteness, differences in population trends, and broad level differences in land-use and macrohabitats. There are currently four recovery units for the Indiana bat: Ozark-Central, Midwest, Appalachian Mountains, and Northeast. All of Ohio falls within the Midwest Recovery Unit.

In 2007, white nose syndrome (WNS) was found to fatally affect several species of bats, including the Indiana bat in eastern hibernacula. To date, WNS is known from New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Connecticut (all within the Northeast Recovery Unit). Roughly 70,000 Indiana bats, approximately 15% of the total population, occur in the affected states and are vulnerable to WNS at this time. The extent of the impact this syndrome may have on the species rangewide is uncertain but based on our current limited understanding of WNS, we expect mortality of bats at affected sites to be high (personal communication, L. Pruitt, 2008).

Environmental Baseline

The environmental baseline for the species listed above was fully described on pages 21-26 of the PBO and is hereby incorporated by reference. Since the issuance of the PBO in 2007, there has been no change in the environmental baseline.

Status of the species within the action area

Since the issuance of the PBO in 2007, there have been no new Indiana bat capture records within the vicinity of this project. Your documentation states that suitable habitat exists within the action area, thus we are assuming presence.

Effects of the Action

Based on analysis of the information provided in your letter and supporting documentation for the POR-Rock Spring Road bridge replacement project and our review of available habitat surrounding the project area, we have determined that the effects of the proposed action are consistent with those contemplated and fully described on pages 31-35 of the PBO. Adverse effects to the Indiana bat from this project could occur due to the removal of a potential maternity roost tree. However, implementation of seasonal cutting restrictions (alternative measure A-1) will avoid direct adverse effects to individual bats. Projects that require the removal of one or more potential primary maternity roost trees outside of the Indiana bats' maternity season can result in adverse effects to colony members upon their return to maternity areas following hibernation. When a primary roost tree becomes unsuitable, members of a colony may initially distribute themselves among several previously used alternate roost trees (USFWS 2002; Kurta et al. 2002). It is not known how long it takes for the colony to attain the same level of roosting cohesiveness that it experienced prior to the loss of an important primary roost tree. As explained in the PBO, colony cohesiveness is essential for successful birth and rearing of young. It is likely that due to the ephemeral nature of roost trees, the Indiana bat has evolved to be able to relocate replacement roosts, if available, when their previously-used roost trees become unsuitable. Until the bats from the colony locate another desirable primary roost tree and reunite, it is possible, however, that some individual members of a colony will be subject to increased stress resulting from: (1) having to search for a replacement primary roost tree, which increases energy expenditure and risk of predation; (2) having to roost in alternate trees that are less effective in meeting thermoregulatory needs; and (3) having to roost singly, rather than together,

which decreases the likelihood in meeting thermoregulatory needs, thereby reducing the potential for reproductive success.

Adult male and non-reproductive female Indiana bats may be indirectly exposed to loss of roosting habitat. In general, effects on these individual bats would be less severe than the effects associated with individuals of maternity colonies. Adult male and non-reproductive female Indiana bats are not subject to the physiological demands of pregnancy and rearing young.

Males and non-reproductive females typically roost alone or occasionally in small groups. When these individuals are displaced from roosts they must utilize alternative roosts or seek out new roosts. Because these individuals are not functioning as members of maternity colonies, they do not face the challenge of reforming as a colony. Roost tree requirements for non-reproductive Indiana bats are less specific whereas maternity colonies generally require larger roost trees to accommodate multiple members of a colony. Therefore, it is anticipated that adverse indirect effects to non-reproductive bats will be less than the effects to reproductively active females. The Service anticipates that indirect effects to non-reproductive Indiana bats from the loss of roosting habitat will be insignificant.

We are not aware of any non-federal actions in the action area that are reasonably certain to occur. Thus, we do not anticipate any cumulative effects associated with this project.

Conclusion

We believe the proposed POR-Rock Spring Road bridge replacement project is consistent with the PBO. After reviewing site specific information, including 1) the scope of the project, 2) the environmental baseline, 3) the status of the Indiana bat and its assumed presence within the project area, 4) the effects of the action, and 5) any cumulative effects, it is the Service’s biological opinion that this project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Indiana bat.

Incidental Take Statement

The Service anticipates that the proposed action will result in incidental take associated with projects in the Northeast management unit. Incidental take for this project is 3.7 acres, resulting in the cumulative incidental take of 140.45 for this management unit. This project, added to the cumulative total of incidental take for the implementation of ODOT’s Statewide Transportation Program, is well within the level of incidental take anticipated in the PBO through 2012 (see table below).

Management Unit	IT anticipated in PBO	IT for this project	Cumulative IT granted to date
West	1,565 acres	0 acres	79.14 acres
Central	2,280 acres	0 acres	27.50 acres
Northeast	4,679 acres	3.7 acres	140.45 acres
East	6,370 acres	0 acres	58.74 acres
South	7,224 acres	0 acres	52.09 acres
Statewide	22,118 acres	3.7 acres	357.92 acres

We determined that this level of anticipated and exempted take of Indiana bats from the proposed project, in conjunction with the other actions taken by ODOT pursuant to the PBO to date, is not likely to result in jeopardy to the species.

We understand that ODOT is implementing all pertinent Indiana bat conservation measures, specifically A-1 and M-2 stipulated in the Biological Assessment on pages 29-31. In addition, ODOT is monitoring the extent of incidental take that occurs on a project-by-project basis. These measures will minimize the impact of the anticipated incidental take.

This fulfills your section 7(a)(2) requirements for this action. However, should the proposed project be modified or the level of take identified above be exceeded, ODOT should promptly reinitiate consultation as outlined in 50 CFR 402.16. As provided in 50 CFR §402.16, reinitiation of formal consultation is required where discretionary Federal agency involvement or control over the action has been retained (or is authorized by law) and if: (1) the amount or extent of incidental take is exceeded; (2) new information reveals effects of the continued implementation of ODOT's Statewide Transportation Program and projects predicated upon it may affect listed species in a manner or to an extent not considered in this opinion; (3) the continued implementation of ODOT's Statewide Transportation Program and projects predicated upon it are subsequently modified in a manner that cause an effect to federally listed species not considered in this opinion; or (4) a new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the action. In instances where the amount or extent of incidental take is exceeded, any operations causing such take must cease, pending reinitiation. Requests for reinitiation, or questions regarding reinitiation, should be directed to the U.S. Fish Wildlife Service's Ohio Field Office.

We appreciate your continued efforts to ensure that this project is consistent with all provisions outlined in the Biological Assessment and PBO. If you have any questions regarding our response or if you need additional information, please contact Karen Hallberg at extension 23.

Sincerely,



for Mary Knapp, Ph.D.
Field Supervisor

cc: ODNR, DOW, SCEA Unit, Columbus, OH
Ohio Regulatory Transportation Office, Columbus, OH